



BOB CASEY

FIGHTING *for* PENNSYLVANIA FAMILIES

The Supporting All Students Act

U.S. Senators Bob Casey and Sherrod Brown

Peer and school-based mental health support are critical to address the youth mental health crisis

According to data from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), more than 4 in 10 students feel persistently sad or hopeless. Despite increased awareness in our schools, many students continue to fall through the cracks due to shortages of mental health professionals and a lack of proactive outreach to check on students' wellbeing. Within the spectrum of mental health needs, most students are not in crisis, but many lack social support and need a trustworthy individual to talk to and work through challenges with.

Two approaches to vastly expand social support for youth are peer support and mental health coordinators. [Youth peer support](#) programs offer support from trained peers who [shared lived experiences](#) related to mental health and create [non-hierarchical relationships](#) built on [mutual trust](#). Young people who receive [peer support](#) report [improvements in self-esteem, self-efficacy, and recovery from mental health conditions](#). Further, employing mental health coordinators in schools is a promising approach to ensure youth have someone to turn to when they are experiencing stress. These coordinators are trained to respond to concerns regarding mental health and wellbeing and make connections to community-based supports.

The Supporting All Students Act

The Supporting All Students Act is a two-pronged approach to increasing access to mental health support, establishing a youth peer-to-peer support line and a grant program for school-based mental health coordinators.

Youth peer-to-peer support line: This bill would establish a youth peer-to-peer support line, available via call, text, and chat, that is integrated into 988. Youth could reach the line directly or via a 988 referral for issues including relationship or family problems, academic or athletics-related stress, feelings of depression or anxiety, and bullying. Youth would be connected with a trained peer responder for support.

Mental health coordinators: This bill establishes a grant program run through the Department of Education for schools to hire mental health coordinators who would:

1. Provide information about school- and community-based mental health resources;
2. Partner with licensed mental health professionals to identify and meet with students experiencing stress, social isolation, family instability, homelessness, or other adverse childhood experiences;
3. Help students strengthen their social support network and engagement in positive activities; and
4. Establish relationships with community-based mental health providers, including child and adolescent therapists, family therapists, neuropsychologists, and child and adolescent psychiatrists, and facilitate the transition from school- to community-based care as needed.

Supporting organizations: American Federation of Teachers, American Psychological Association Services, the Children's Defense Fund, First Focus Campaign for Children, Family Voices, the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, the National League for Nursing, Primary Care Development Corporation, the School-Based Health Alliance, the School Social Work Association of America, the Youth Power Project, and Youth Villages